

WOMEN IN THE VEDAS

By Achārya Bramdeo Mokoonlall

Author's note: This article was originally written in March 2018 and re-edited with an annex, as a 2nd part - a caption **“WOMEN IN VEDAS AND ANCIENT INDIA”**, which are *Excerpts from Dr. S.K. Bharadwaj's book “Vedas A New Perception”*, courteously shared by Shri Daksh Bharadwaj of Delhi.

Women hold the most prominent place in society. After marriage, the *Garbhādāna Samskāra* is the next sacrament where the couple prays and vows to put up all efforts to beget progeny that would grow to be human beings of the highest order in terms of character, actions and innate temperament. In fact the effort starts well before conception. The duties of the husband and all relatives encompass amongst others, the need to create a physical, mental, emotional and social environment conducive to the development of the would-be-mother and the to-be-born child.

The Vedas, more fully expounded by seers / sages of yore (rishis), call upon humanity to have due respect towards women folk ...hold them in high esteem as we do unto our mothers and sisters. The life story of Maharshi Dayānand Saraswatī has at least one reference ...he bows in front of a girl child.

Matrimān pitrimān āchārymān purusho vedah (Shatpatha Brāhmana) states: “He/she alone can become a great scholar who has had the advantage of three good teachers, viz., the mother, the father, and the preceptor. The family is blessed and the child is most fortunate when the parents are righteous and learned.”

The mother has a healthy influence on her children which surpasses that of everyone else. No other person can equal a mother in her love for her children, or in her concern for their welfare. Matrimān refers to the devout and learned mother who continuously strive to impart the universal Vedic (human/living) values, a truly spiritual tone to the mind of her child from the time of conception till his knowledge is perfected. It is no surprise that ‘modern concepts’ concur with the Vedic ideals that the mother’s lap is the best university for the development of the humane aspect of children.

The following terms referring to women folk in the Vedas speak volumes:

- **Kanya:** Intelligent girl with brilliant character, actions and temperament.
- **Duhita:** daughter who cultivates a radiant personality like the rising sun; educated, cultured, multi-skilled; apt to dispel the darkness of ignorance; has subdued/tamed ego (me, mine & myself), overpowered attachment and hate, and surmounted the fear of death; abides by the tenets of *dharma* (virtue); benevolent, compassionate.

- **Mātarah:** a lady who not only gives birth to the child, but more importantly is responsible for moulding the personality of her children to be virtuous in thoughts, speech and actions at all times; who instils her children to put up 100% physical and mental efforts towards realising the goals of human life (*dharmā-artha-kāma-moksha*).

A successful mother or father is referred as such only when the child grows to be at least 10 steps ahead of his parents, **both** in terms of material and spiritual prosperity. Human life is nowadays more skewed towards leaving a huge material legacy but little in terms of living values. Why? ***It seems that mothers were formerly less literate, but more educated as regards to life skills - behaviour and way of doing things.***

Emphasis is currently only on literacy and numeracy skills, that is- the three R's (**R**eading, **wR**iting & **aR**ithmetic) with no time to inculcate the universal Vedic values through story telling as our elders did. Pushing the dirt under the doors of development and technology is the ideal blame game ...these lifeless tools do not switch on by themselves and do not pull us to them ...rather we switch them on and unconditionally surrender ourselvesno quality time for the family but indefinite time for television, games, social networking, etc. ...little or no networking between our actions: thoughts, speech and physical actions.

Self-introspection is the one-and-only process which would empower us to be true to ourselves and thoughtfully gauge our success rate in the holistic development of our children, the would-be-mothers/fathers of forthcoming generations.

Women's Day (Mahila Divas) is time for us to open our eyes ...to address contemporary problems at the root level ...to stop the face-lifting policy of pruning the branches and leaves or embellished wrapping.

Satyam Vada, Dharmam Chara

Speak the truth, Lead a righteous life. The untold meaning (*akankasha*) is: "Be a role model, a real life example". That is the highest knowledge, the only invaluable/intangible heritage to our children!

**Respect for womenfolk should not be mere words or a one-off, one-day event.
Awareness should be 24x7 basis (round the clock: 24 hours a day and 7 days a week).
Role models, please walk-the-talk.**

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WOMEN IN VEDAS AND ANCIENT INDIA

(Excerpts from Dr. S.K. Bharadwaj's book "Vedas A New Perception")

Contributed by Shri Daksh Bharadwaj

Status, empowerment and respect

There have been such varied views regarding "*woman*". The views have been based on religion, culture, customs and history of different people of the world. Some hold that woman is the cause of sufferings & curses. She is a woe to man. It is she who had beguiled the first man Adam, and persuaded him to disobey God and commit sin, for eating the fruit of knowledge. It is she who had prevailed upon Adam, in disobeying Him. Man would have ever enjoyed the happiness of heaven and would not have been exiled or thrown down to the earth, to toil and earn his living with sweat on his brows, had not Eve prevailed on Adam. They also blame her being the cause of destruction of Empires and dynasties. They have been the cause of wars. They quote examples of *Sita*, *Draupadi*, *Cleopatra* etc. for whose cause great wars were fought and thousands died and lot of destruction was caused.

On the other hand woman is the '*womb*' of man. He is her creation. She is called "*Mātā*", which means (*nirmātri*) the 'maker, the builder of her progeny. It is also known that behind many great men there had been great women as their backbone. She is called (*Shakti*) great force. C'zar the Great was the creation of his mother.

Armed with such virtues, she is named a '*devee*' a goddess in India. But there are many, in the eyes of which women have a lower status. Women folk have been fighting for their liberty and equality. In India too, for some centuries, an inferior status had been given to women. We consider this is due to the Islamic effect in our society, because the Muslims ruled our country for a long period.

According to the Vedic Teachings and ancient Aryan scriptures women have a *higher status than man*. She had been given preference to man in every field, so much so that when giving a boy a joint name of a god and goddess, the name of the goddess is always placed before the god. For example:-

In the name "*Sitā Rāma*", *Sitā* was wife of *Rāma*, so also in "*Radhe Shyāma*" *Rādhā* was wife of *Kṛṣṇa*. Again "*Gowree Shankar*", *Gowree* was Shankara's or Lord Shiva's wife. We refer to our homeland as '*motherland*', unlike the Germans and Dutch who use *Vaterland* and *Vaderland* which means '*fatherland*'. We call it '*motherland*' as mother is superior to father. We feel we are more indebted to mother than father, so every child was first told "*Mātri devobhava*", then "*Pitri devobhava*". Above all, mother is respected as goddess, ranks first in esteem. That was taught to every child.

Woman stands paramount in Vedic culture. We go so far to say that if one wants to know the kind of culture and civilization of a nation, one has only to observe how that nation

treats its women folk. *She is the symbol of culture*. She is not a commodity or booty of war as one finds in other countries. We place women at the highest state.

***“Yatra nāryastu poojyante ramante tatra devatāh,
Yatraitāstu na poojyante sarvās tatra aphalāh kriyāh”***

(Manu III-56)

Wherever, (*nāryah*) women (*Poojyante*) are adored and regarded, believe it, (*ramante tatra devatāh*) there reside godly people and where (*etā*) these (*na poojyante*) are not regarded or neglected, (*tatra*) there, (*kriyā*) all efforts of men (*aphalā*) will bear no fruit, that is, will be wasted.

EDUCATION OF WOMEN

In the field of education, women had equal opportunities.

As mentioned before there had been more than 27 *Ṛishikās* mentioned in Ṛg Veda only, who explained, interpreted various hymns. They had been highly educated and wise women, who entered in most intricate and subtle subjects of even cosmology, like *Gārgī*, *Maitreyī*, and *Sulabhā* etc. They are the glaring examples. *Gārgī Vāchakvanī*, was so learned that when she was discussing cosmological problems, she actually cornered, the great *Ṛishi* of her time, *Yājñyavalkya*, who was forced to reply her only in negation, (*Neti Neti*) “Not this” “Not this”.

Woman in the past, surpassed men in the fields of literature, music, art and fine art. There had been great women, like *Shila Bhattārikā*, *Mārutī*, *Morikā* and *Subhadrā* etc. *Vijayānganā* is counted next to *Kali Das* as a dramatist. On state administration and military services, they contributed equally. In military science, *Kaikayī*, queen of king *Dasharatha* helped her husband and extricated him from a very difficult situation in war

The women of India have been treated as a great (*shakti*) force. They have great potential, and have proved their might at time when our country needed it. They have stood, shoulder to shoulder, with men during adverse times, but at the same time retained the benevolent and soft feeling at heart.

Veda thus presents the woman’s status much higher than of man by calling her a *Devī*, a goddess and also presents her in a perspective of combined, *Durga*, *Saraswatī* and *Lakshmī*, that is their possessing virtues and qualities of great force, wisdom and prosperity.

In the Veda, the bride to be, is called *Kanyā* and ***she has the birth right of choice of a spouse***, as ordained in the following Vedic hymn: “*Brahmacharyena kanyā yuvānam vindate patim*” (*Atharva Veda XI-5-18*).